

**Statement by the Honorable Sam Brownback
Upon Consideration of the Farm Bill
Tuesday February 12, 2002
United States Senate**

Mr. President – For several months now, the attention of the Senate has been focused on the condition of farming in America. While this is a rite of some regularity every few years when we consider again the many hundreds of federal programs that affect American agriculture, it is a subject of ongoing interest for those of us whose states rely disproportionately on farming. As Kansas' Secretary of Agriculture I had a unique opportunity to see all aspects of farming in our state and I rise today to briefly discuss the important priorities for Kansas in this Farm Bill.

Despite my concerns about many other provisions in this farm bill -- I am very pleased to see that our carbon sequestration provisions are included. This portion could help build a new market for farmers -- one that pays them for how they produce, not just what they produce.

The Wyden-Brownback amendment builds on this promise and expands it to help us explore how carbon trading might work by using our cooperatives.

Carbon sequestration is a largely untapped resource that can buy us the one thing we need most in this debate: time. The Department of Energy estimates that over the next 50 to 100 years, agricultural lands alone could have the potential to remove anywhere from 40 to 80 billion metric tons of carbon from the atmosphere. If we expand this to include forests, the number will be far greater – indicating there is a real difference that could be made by encouraging a carbon sink approach.

Carbon sequestration alone can not solve the climate change dilemma, but as we search for technological advancements that allow us to create energy with less pollution, and as we continue to research the cause and potential effects of climate change, it only makes sense that we enhance a natural process we already know has the benefit of reducing existing concentrations of greenhouse gases – particularly when this process also improves water quality, soil fertility and wildlife habitat. This is a no-regrets policy – much like taking out insurance on your house or car. We should do no less for the protection of the Planet.

In addition to this carbon sequestration provision, I am also pleased that we will be able to address another pressing environmental issue facing our country and particularly Kansas. Water, so essential to cultivation, is a top priority for Kansas farmers and I am pleased to say that this Farm Bill can help in this vital area as well.

The Kansas Water Authority has been considering ways to extend the usable life of the Ogallala Aquifer and assure ground water will be available to meet the needs of future generations. The long term sustainability of ground water supplies is a concern of mine and I am pleased with the portion of the farm bill that creates the Southern High Plains Aquifer Groundwater Conservation Program. This legislation takes the necessary first step to protect and conserve this valuable resource. A reliable source of groundwater is essential to the economy of Kansas. There have been dramatic declines in water table levels in the last half of this century.

It is projected that if no action is taken the aquifer could in some portions be completely dry in 100 years. Kansas is one of the states where this decline is especially pronounced.

Through this new program in the Farm Bill, farmers will be given incentive payments for improving irrigation systems, changing from high-water intensity crops to low-water intensity crops, as well as converting from irrigation to dryland farming. Payments will be made as a result of a true savings in groundwater resources. I am pleased to have worked with my colleague, Senator Jeff Bingaman, in supporting this portion of the Farm Bill and hope that the rest of our colleagues will see how important this program is to saving the usable life of the Ogallala Aquifer.

The farm bill currently under consideration is not the bill that I would have drafted, independent of the deliberations of this body. However Mr./Madame President, this effort is an initiative that is desperately needed by America's farm families. I was supportive of a plan that looked more like the House passed initiative, but a compromise along those lines is no where in sight.

Because the present bill contains a number of provisions that I believe will hurt many Kansas families I will, with regret, be voting against this version of the bill. However, I am hopeful that, working with our colleagues in the other body, we will craft a compromise that protects our priorities. We need to remove the detrimental water rights provisions that pose a terrible new threat to agriculture and the ability of farmers and ranchers to remain economically viable. Despite this set back, and other problems with this particular bill, we do need a farm bill that can provide a safety net for farmers, but that will not create negative incentives to overproduce and depress crop prices. We need a bill that supports expanding trade opportunities and respects our international commitments. We need a bill that will, in the President's words, "offers producers a reliable safety net that protects them from the financial events and circumstances beyond their control, while enabling them to better manage their individual financial situation." I remain very hopeful Mr./Madame President that we will be able to speed help to American agriculture and remove the cloud of uncertainty that presently shrouds the prairie farms in Kansas and America's agriculture economy generally.

Thank you for the time.